



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:25

7 March 2023

Present:

City Councillors:

Kendrick (substitute for Huntley)
Kidman
Wright

County Councillors:

Birmingham
Ward (in the chair)

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Apologies:

City Councillors Huntley (chair) Grahame, Schmierer and Thomas (Vi),
County Councillors Brociek-Coulton (other council business), Reilly,
Rumsby and Watkins, Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and
Councillor King (Broadland District Council) and Councillor Spruce
(South Norfolk District Council)

1. Appointment of chair

In the absence of the chair and vice chair it was **RESOLVED** to appoint County Councillor Ward as chair for the duration of the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

4. Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022.

5. Norwich Museums Report – November 2022 to January 2023

The assistant head of museums introduced the report and proposed that he and his colleagues would present the relevant sections and pause after each section for members to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums presented the first section of the report. A large proportion of the COVID-19 measures were still in place which included CO2 monitoring that could be accessed by staff remotely and in person. With regard to the Museum of Norwich the service was looking at using CO2 monitoring to close some windows that had been kept open to allow for better ventilation. This would help with keeping the appropriate humidity for the collections.

The operations manager presented section 2 of the report. He highlighted that the retail offer in the Rotunda had been enhanced which included stock related to exhibitions at the Castle Museum. He referred members to section 2.2 of the report which detailed the number of ceremonies that had taken place over the previous 12 months. While the winter months were the quiet period for ceremonies the numbers remained strong.

The learning manager presented section 3 of the report. He highlighted that there was significant educational interest in the new exhibition *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester: Norfolk's Royal Shipwreck, 1682*. This built on the success of *The Singh Twins: Slaves to Fashion* exhibition, where a number of educational tours and events had been hosted in relation to the event. The learning manager detailed a number of events that had been hosted by the Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) learning team as described in the report. These had received positive feedback. He also highlighted the work of the home education group with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities which had positive feedback. The group had become well established and therefore would continue past March 2023. The learning manager also detailed the Early Years sessions and the partnership between NMS and the Millennium Library with regard to Early Years practice. This partnership was also working in other areas and the service were looking to establish reading areas within the museum. The learning team were also looking at the new education space within the Norwich Castle project and how to fit this out. An additional funding bid had been submitted to help the space to be as flexible as possible to ensure it remained accessible to all.

In response to a member's query the learning manager said that he did not have sufficient analysis on the school visit figures but he believed that the higher number of visits in November was due to the fact that there were no school holidays.

The learning manager drew member's attention to section 3.3 of the report on the visitor programme. He detailed some of the events that had been hosted by NMS. Many of these were in relation to *The Singh Twins* exhibition. This had included a programme, *Together at the Seams*, which detailed the personal stories woven into textiles and *Confronting Colonialism* guided tours of the exhibition. The chair commented that it would be useful for the *Confronting Colonialism* tours to continue once the commissioned work from the Singh Twins had been permanently installed.

The learning manager detailed that part of the Norwich Castle project Activity Plan activities, *Christmas at the Castle*, had to be transferred to Strangers' Hall due to the failure of the heating system at the Castle and its subsequent closure. A number of other activities continued at the Castle Museum including the Knight Club, the development of community hoardings and medieval board games.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4 of the report, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update. Since the start of the project a total of 13,425

interventions had taken place with 4354 individuals which exceeded the target of 8000 interventions. The project follows a progression pathway moving individuals from Player to Shaper to Leader level. 86% of activities involved young people taking on shaping and leading the activities. The project had also benefited NMS staff, nearly 400 members of staff had been trained. This training had given them more confidence in dealing with young people, especially those with access needs.

As principal funding for the project from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) was ending in March 2023 additional funding had been secured. Funding had been secured from Arts Council England which would continue activities around improving access into the heritage sector. Another round of funding had been secured from Norfolk County Council Public Health to look at helping to prevent poor mental health in participants. The funding would also help to better measure the mental health outcomes of the project. The final evaluation report on the Kick the Dust project had been received by the service. There had also been an institutional review of NMS which highlighted that over the previous four years young people were now at the heart of the service. The new funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund that had been prepared with YMCA Leicester had now been submitted. This project, 'Your Heritage Your Future', would work with museums across the East of England to help train them to best support young people with access needs, which could include paid traineeships. The chair commented that it was positive to see that parts of the project would continue.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5 of the report. Members of the committee had been on a site tour of the Norwich Castle construction site before the start of the committee. This had allowed the committee to see progress since the last tour in September 2022. The assistant head of museums confirmed that the Changing Places toilet was now open and was listed on the Changing Places website.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6 of the report. He highlighted that the other museum sites in Norwich were able to use their limited resources to provide access to the collections for the people of Norwich. The Museum of Norwich had been working with Art at Work on the *Threads of Connection* project. Since the completion of the project Art at Work had been successful in getting funding from the NHLF to continue their work for a further three years at the museum. A Kick the Dust project had been helped by Museum of Norwich staff which had been focussed on the Baedeker Raids on Norwich in 1942. It had been key for young people to be able to see their work showcased. The assistant head of museums highlighted the other activities that had happened at the Museum of Norwich which included working with Vision Norfolk, English Plus and tutors from Norwich University of the Arts. The museum had also hosted a Kick the Dust participant in their pre-traineeship. This would help to develop the different models of traineeships that allow young people gaining confidence when working both in the heritage sector and elsewhere. The museum was keen to develop their retail offer to create a unique experience that was based on the museum's location in the Norwich Lanes.

The chair queried whether the shop on the corner was still being used for children's activities. In response the assistant head of museums said that access to the shop was difficult, it had been trialled having this open as an information space during events. However it required separate staffing to the main entrance of the museum but the service were looking into how to do this, especially on busy days. The retail

offer in the windows of the main museum entrance had been positive with drawing people into the museum.

He detailed section 6.2 of the report. Due to the closure of Norwich Castle resulting from the failure of the heating system the Christmas season at Strangers' Hall had been particularly busy, with the museum open for additional days. The museum had hosted their first British Sign Language tour. The tour had been specifically designed to be provided in BSL. As part of the festive season the museum had also hosted a Christmas performance from the Norwich Puppet Theatre. The assistant head of museums commended both staff of Strangers' Hall and the Castle for transferring the Castle's Christmas offering to Strangers' Hall. The annual deep clean of Strangers' Hall had happened in January 2023 thanks to the help of volunteers. This ensured that the collections were maintained and free from insect infestation. Any at risk items had been taken to Gressenhall to be frozen to rid them of any insects.

A member queried the process of freezing collection items to rid them of insects. The assistant head of museums said that the freezers used were at a much lower temperature than domestic freezers. Items would be carefully frozen, thawed and then frozen again to kill off any insects. Staff were very experienced in conducting this process.

The chair queried why the Lord Mayor's carriage was not on display at Strangers' Hall. The assistant head of museums said that conservation work had been done on the carriage. The operations manager said that some damp issues had been identified in the storage area, these would need to be dealt with before the carriage could be displayed.

The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art presented section 7 of the report. She highlighted the activities of the curatorial team. Since the closure of the Singh Twins exhibition the curator of modern and contemporary art was working on curating display cases that would be installed with the commissioned work *Alternative A-Z of Empire* to complement the work. As the Gloucester exhibition had now opened members of the curatorial team were hosting a number of events. The senior curator of natural history and geology had been providing training to a number of different organisations and museums on their local fossils and geology. As these organisations might have queries on fossils found by members of the public. Items from the natural history collection had featured on the BBC's Winterwatch programme. The curator of the regimental collections had been working on a project that was looking at highlighting the regimental collection to new audiences, part of this project has involved taking high-resolution photographs of individual items.

The chair commented that the Gloucester exhibition has been very positive, he had visited the exhibition for both the opening and then at a later date. Lord and Lady Dannatt had created a trust to look into keeping the items from the wreck on display in Norfolk.

A member queried why the East Gallery that had held items from the Singh Twins exhibition had closed earlier than planned. The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine things said that she would find out and report back.

The operations manager presented section 8 of the report. The external lift was now operational again as scaffolding had been erected in preparation for the replacement

of the smashed glass panel. A member queried whether the lift would be out of action for the repair. The operations manager said that this would likely be the case but they would aim for this part of the works to be completed on a quieter day.

The chair commented that this incident could have been prevented if the gate to Castle Gardens had been closed after a certain time. The operations manager said that Castle Gardens was managed by Norwich City Council and the museums service would raise the issue again with the city council.

The operations manager highlighted section 8.2 of the report. The new boiler system at Norwich Castle had been installed following the total failure in December 2023. A decision had been taken to close the museum early for the Christmas shutdown and to delay turning on the new boilers until 27 December 2023. Due to the need to ensure that the collections within the Castle were not subject to temperature fluctuations the temperature was raised in a phased way and the Castle was able to reopen on 31 December 2023. The new heating system had more boilers and therefore two boilers could be lost and there would still be sufficient heating making the system more resilient. A member queried whether there was any damage to the collection due to the temperature falling below 16°C. The operations manager said that they were unable to move all of the collections elsewhere, the fall in temperature had also not been sudden but gradual. The biggest concern for the integrity of the collections had been in relation to humidity rising. However, the service had been able to reduce humidity during this period.

The operations manager updated members on the progress of the works to Shirehall Courtroom. The scaffolding for the works were being erected in the week of 6 March 2023. It had become clear that significant works were required, the contractors would also use the opportunity to remedy some damp issues found within the offices and the costume and textiles stores. For the works to be completed in the stores the collection would need to be moved, as a space had not yet been found the remedial works to the costume and textiles stores would be towards the end of the six months of planned construction works.

The operations manager presented section 9 of the report. He highlighted that the effect of the Christmas closure of the Castle Museum was evident in the visitor numbers, with a reduction for the Castle Museum and the increase in numbers for Strangers' Hall. The opening week of the Gloucester exhibition had seen a positive uplift, with figures likely to be doubled in March. The service's social media channels had been active to drive more visitors to the exhibition. He said that Museum of Norwich had returned to pre-pandemic levels of visitor numbers. A member queried why the numbers for the Castle Museum were so much higher in August 2021. The assistant head of museums said that this was due to Freeman event which helped to drive numbers higher.

The members thanked the assistant head of museums and his staff for the report.

RESOLVED to note the Norwich Museums Report November 2022 to January 2023.

6. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, had provided a written report which had been circulated to members at the meeting and was available on the

website [here](#). She highlighted that a bequest had been made by a Friend and that the money would be used on the refurbishment of a 16th century tapestry at Strangers' Hall.

Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS), addressed the committee and said that NCAS had held a number of successful talks, and the programme of talks would continue in 2023. The organisation would be holding an auction to help raise funds. NCAS were also looking at exhibition spaces in Norwich working with other organisations and asked for any suggestion to be passed to her. The chair commented that a possibility was the Old United Church in Princes Street as it had been empty for a number of years. A member suggested the shoe factory social club at St Marys Works.

RESOLVED to thank Danusia Wurm and Felicity Devonshire for their reports and record the committee's gratitude to the voluntary organisations that support the Norwich museums.

7. Schedule of Meetings – Civic Year 2023-24

The chair introduced the item.

RESOLVED to note the proposed schedule of meetings for the civic year 2023-24, subject to approval at Norwich City Council's annual council.

CHAIR